

Strybel - Wigilia from 1

the whole time, those long dark evenings before Christmas can be spent preparing home-made Christmas tree ornaments. The very ambitious can try their hand at building a nativity set: either a rustic, peasant-style Christmas crib or an impressive, shimmering castle-like "Szopka Krakowska" (Kraków creche).

Christmas Tree

Whether your Christmas tree is real or fake, decorated with home-made or store-bought ornaments, be sure not to put it up too early. Ideally it should be set up and trimmed on Christmas Eve itself and not lighted until the Wigilia supper begins. If you have small children saying: "But David and Jennifer have their trees up since Thanksgiving," you can always reply: "That's true, but they will probably take them down the day after Christmas, while we get to enjoy ours until Three Kings." If they ask "What are Three Kings?" - that is the perfect occasion to tell them about the Wise men visiting Baby Jesus and other wondrous things about the first Christmas.

The Food

Wigilia is a meat repast comprising an odd number (usually 5, 7, 9 or 11) different dishes, although in some families 12 dishes (in memory of the 12 Apostles) are served. For beginners we suggest a simple five-course meal: mushroom noodle soup, creamed herring with boiled potatoes, fried fish with sauerkraut salad, noodle, stewed dried-fruit compote and noodles & poppy seeds. Consult a good Polish cookbook for these and other Wigilia recipes.

Setting the Table

A little hay is traditionally strewn across the bare tabletop before being covered with a pure-white table-cloth. (Tablecloths splattered with Santas, holly wreaths, candy canes, elves, etc. detract from the desired solemnity.) An extra place is set in memory of a departed loved one. On a cherished china or crystal plate, or one of those Polish carved wooden plates, place several evergreen twigs. Top them with a bed of hay and place the op³atek thereon. There should also be a single solitary candle on the table.

Wigilia Supper

The festivities begin around 6 PM. Participants, dressed in their holiday best, gather round the table. The eldest person present makes the Sign of the Cross and leads grace: "Pobłogosław nas, Panie Boże Wszechmogący, i te dary, które spożywać będziemy na pamiątkę radosnych narodzin Jezusa Chrystusa, Pana naszego, który żyje i króluje na wieki wieków. Amen." (Bless us, Lord God Almighty, and these gifts of which we shall partake in memory of the joyous birth of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.) He or she then lights the candle and says: "Światło Chrystusa" (The Light of Christ), to which all present respond: "Bogu niech będą dzięki" (Thanks be to

God). He or she takes the op³atek, makes a Sign of the Cross over it, breaks it and shares bits of it and extends best wishes to all present. Each participant does likewise until everyone has shared bits of oplatek and exchanged wishes with everyone else. The food is then brought in one dish at a time. Serving all the dishes at one time or setting them out buffet style breaks up the desired spirit of togetherness.

Festivities

After supper, it is traditional to sing "koledy" (carols), either at table or round the Christmas tree if it is in another room. A good storyteller might share with others some of the Polish Christmas lore. For instance, how you are on Wigilia, you will be the whole year. Or how eligible young girls would draw strands of hay from under the table-cloth to see when they would get married or listen for a dog barking outside which supposedly indicated the direction from which a suitor might be expected. Then there was the folk belief that at midnight farm animals could speak, but anyone who heard them would not live to see another Christmas. The water in wells was said to turn to wine, but only those who had never sinned could taste it. After some refreshments and another koleda or two, gifts are exchanged. Tell your youngsters how privileged they are to be Polish, because the non-Polish kids on the block have to wait until the next day to get their presents. Traditionally the culmination of Wigilia is "pasterka", Midnight (shepherds') Mass. On this one night a year, it may be worth your while to drive across town or to a neighboring community to a Polish parish to prolong the genuine ethnic flavor and climate of a truly memorable evening. □

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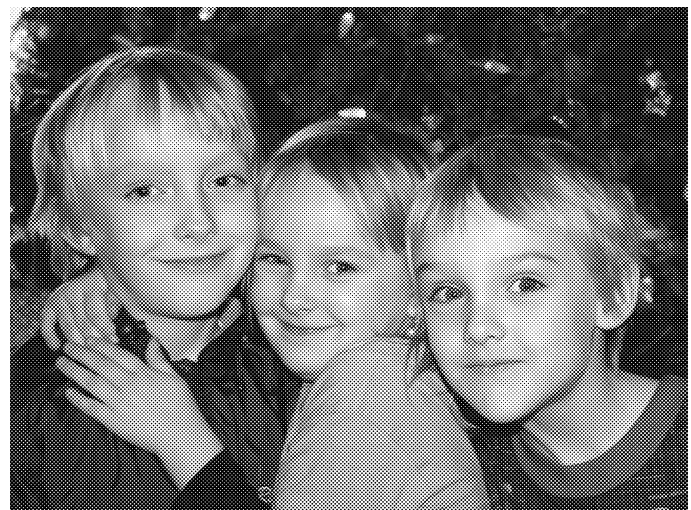
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Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year



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Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year

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Merry Christmas
and a
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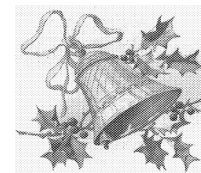
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Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year

The Cepieliks
Gema, Jeff and Jason

Merry Christmas
And a
Happy New Year

The Romeo Family
Mark, Molly and Rita



Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year

from the members and officers of the

Polish Women's Alliance Group 814

What's Your Legacy

Many people talk about leaving their will to worthy causes, but don't have a will, and do not realize it requires a will to do so. The laws of most states make it clear that personal property goes automatically, by law, to your nearest relative, even if they are quite distant ones, unless you have a legal will that says otherwise. If you have no relative, it goes to the state. More than half of all adult Americans die without having made their wills. Most of them undoubtedly planned to do so, but never got around to it. Some had wills but didn't keep them current. When you have a will, you should update it every few years as conditions change. Also, always name an executor who will carry out your wishes. Besides money, non-cash possessions can also be used as contributions and various donation plans can be carried out. Be a philanthropist: leave your stocks, bonds, real estate, art, valuable collection or insurance to continue the Polish - American traditions. Your will is the most important way of giving. When you're gone, it is a legacy that is not forgotten. In your will, you can specify what you would like your donation to be used for. For help in making your will, contact a competent lawyer. **The Kosciuszko Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that needs your help and legacy.**

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